



The April 2010 Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests

Jim Nichol

Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs

May 7, 2010

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

R41178

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 07 MAY 2010		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The April 2010 Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Ave., SE, Washington, DC, 20540-7500				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 18	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Summary

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country in Central Asia that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union (see **Figure A-1**). It has developed a notable but fragile civil society. Progress in democratization has been set back by problematic elections (one of which helped precipitate a coup in 2005 that brought Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power), contention over constitutions, and corruption. The April 2010 coup appears to have been triggered by popular discontent over rising utility prices and government repression. After two days of popular unrest in the capital of Bishkek and other cities, opposition politicians ousted the Bakiyev administration on April 8 and declared an interim government pending a new presidential election in six months. Roza Otunbayeva, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the United States, was declared the acting prime minister. A commission was formed on May 4 to draft a new constitution that reportedly will establish a parliamentary system of governance.

The United States has been interested in helping Kyrgyzstan to enhance its sovereignty and territorial integrity, increase democratic participation and civil society, bolster economic reform and development, strengthen human rights, prevent weapons proliferation, and more effectively combat transnational terrorism and trafficking in persons and narcotics. The significance of Kyrgyzstan to the United States increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The Kyrgyz government permitted the United States to establish a military base at the Manas international airport outside Bishkek that trans-ships personnel, equipment, and supplies to support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. The former Bakiyev government had renegotiated a lease on the airbase in June 2009 (it was renamed the Manas Transit Center), in recognition that ongoing instability in Afghanistan jeopardized regional security. The lease is up for renewal in July 2010. Otunbayeva has declared that the interim government will uphold Kyrgyzstan's existing foreign policy, including the presence of the transit center, although some changes to the lease may be sought in the future. She also has launched an investigation of corrupt dealings by the previous government on fuel contracts and other services for the transit center.

Cumulative U.S. budgeted assistance to Kyrgyzstan for FY1992-FY2008 was \$953.5 million (FREEDOM Support Act and agency funds). Kyrgyzstan ranks third in such aid per capita among the Soviet successor states, indicative of U.S. government and congressional support in the early 1990s for its apparent progress in making reforms and more recently to support anti-terrorism, border protection, and operations in Afghanistan.

As Congress and the Administration consider how to assist democratic and economic transformation in Kyrgyzstan, several possible programs have been suggested, including those to buttress civil rights, bolster political institutions and the rule of law, and encourage private sector economic growth. (See also CRS Report RL33458, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, by Jim Nichol.)

Contents

Most Recent Developments	1
Background	1
The Coup and Its Aftermath	1
Bakiyev's Ouster	2
Implications for Kyrgyzstan	4
International Response	6
Implications for Russia and Other Eurasian States	6
Implications for China	9
Implications for U.S. Interests	9
The U.S. Transit Center and Northern Distribution Network	12

Figures

Figure A-1. Map of Kyrgyzstan	15
-------------------------------------	----

Appendixes

Appendix A. Transitional Government Leaders	14
---	----

Contacts

Author Contact Information	15
----------------------------------	----

Most Recent Developments

On May 6, 2010, Kyrgyzstan formally requested that Belarus extradite former Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev to face charges of murdering civilians during the April coup. The outcome of the request is uncertain. Although Belarus has signed an international extradition accord, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko had granted Bakiyev his “personal protection.”

Background

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor Central Asian country that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The United States has been interested in helping Kyrgyzstan to enhance its sovereignty and territorial integrity, increase democratic participation and civil society, bolster economic reform and development, strengthen human rights, prevent weapons proliferation, and more effectively combat transnational terrorism and trafficking in persons and narcotics. The United States has pursued these interests throughout Central Asia, with special strategic attention to oil-rich Kazakhstan and somewhat less to Kyrgyzstan. The significance of Kyrgyzstan to the United States increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Kyrgyzstan offered to host U.S. forces at an airbase at the Manas international airport outside of the capital, Bishkek, and it opened in December 2001. The U.S. military repaired and later upgraded the air field for aerial refueling, airlift and airdrop, medical evacuation, and support for U.S. and coalition personnel and cargo transiting in and out of Afghanistan. In 2010, the Manas Transit Center hosted about 1,100 U.S., Spanish, and French troops and a fleet of KC-135 refueling tankers.¹

The Coup and Its Aftermath

According to most observers, the proximate causes of the April 2010 coup include massive utility price increases that went into effect on January 1, 2010, during the height of winter weather, and increasing popular perceptions that President Kurmanbek Bakiyev’s administration was rife with corruption and nepotism. The latter appeared to include Bakiyev’s appointment of his son Maksim in late 2009 as head of a new Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation. It was widely assumed that Maksim was being groomed to later assume the presidency. Appearing to fuel this popular discontent, Russia launched a media campaign in Kyrgyzstan against Bakiyev (see below). On March 10, 2010, demonstrators held massive rallies in the town of Naryn, calling on the government to withdraw its decision on price increases and the privatization of energy companies. This demonstration appeared to exacerbate security concerns in the government about other protests planned by the opposition and triggered added efforts to suppress media freedom. Several internet websites, including opposition websites, were closed down, rebroadcasts by RFE/RL and the BBC were suspended, and two opposition newspapers were closed down. At an opposition party bloc meeting in Bishkek on March 17, participants accused the president of usurpation of power, political repression, corrupt privatizations, and unjustified increases in prices for public utilities. They elected Roza

¹ Biography of Col. Blaine D. Holt, U.S. Air Force, at <http://www.manas.afcent.af.mil>. See also CRS Report R40564, *Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the U.S. Manas Airbase: Context and Implications*, by Jim Nichol.

Otunbayeva, the head of the Social Democratic Party faction in the legislature, as the leader of the opposition bloc and announced that nationwide rallies would be held to demand reforms.

President Bakiyev had presumed that a planned annual meeting of the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan (a consultative conclave composed of representatives of ethnic groups) on March 23 would result in an affirmation of his policies, but many participants harshly criticized his rule. He complained afterward that the participants from rural and mountainous areas who were critical were uninformed, and that legislators should visit the areas to educate the voters. He claimed that the assembly had endorsed his plans to change the constitution to reorganize the government to elevate the status of the assembly as part of a new “consultative democracy.” Elections would be abolished and the “egoism” of human rights would be replaced by “public morals,” he stated. These proposals appeared similar to those taken in Turkmenistan by the late authoritarian President Saparamurad Niyazov. Bakiyev also had moved the Border Service and Emergencies Ministry headquarters to Osh and was planning on moving the Defense Ministry offices there, claiming that more security was needed in the south. Other observers viewed the moves as a means of shifting some economic power and authority to the south of the country, where Bakiyev’s family and clans, who have long been excluded from power in Bishkek, reside.

Problems of democratization and human rights in Kyrgyzstan were highlighted during a visit by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on April 3, 2010. He stated in a speech to the Kyrgyz legislature that “the protection of human rights is a bedrock principle if a country is to prosper.... Recent events have been troubling, including the past few days.... All human rights must be protected, including free speech and freedom of the media.” He also reported that during a meeting with President Bakiyev, he “urged the president to orient his policies to promote the democratic achievements of Kyrgyzstan, including its free press.”² Some observers viewed this visit as further fueling popular discontent against Bakiyev.

Bakiyev’s Ouster

Faced with the rising discontent, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov ordered the government on April 5 to pay half the power bills of rural households. However, the next day a reported 1,000 or more protesters stormed government offices in the western city of Talas. Security forces flown from Bishkek retook the building in the evening, but were forced out by protesters. Responding to the violence in Talas, government security forces on April 6 reportedly accused the head of the Social Democratic Party and former presidential candidate Almazbek Atambayev of fomenting the unrest and detained him. Other opposition leaders also were detained on April 6-7, including Omurbek Tekebayev, head of the Ata Meken Party; Isa Omurkulov, a member of the legislature from the Social Democratic Party; Temir Sariyev, the head of the Ak-Shumkar Party; and others.

On April 7, unrest spread to the Naryn, Chui, Talas, and Issyk-Kul regions, where regional and district government buildings were overrun by protesters. Even some district administrations in southwestern Jalal-Abad Region, President Bakiyev’s home region, were occupied by protesters. In Bishkek, police and about 400 protesters violently clashed on the morning of April 7 outside the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party in Bishkek. Prime Minister Usenov declared a nationwide state of emergency. Protesters then gathered and soon overwhelmed the police, taking control of two armored vehicles and automatic weapons.

² U.N. Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General. *Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 April 2010: Secretary-General’s Remarks to the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament of Kyrgyzstan)*, April 3, 2010.

The protesters, now numbering between 3,000-5,000, surrounded the presidential offices. They asked President Bakiyev and Prime Minister Usenov to come out and talk to them, and after the two leaders refused, the protesters stormed the building. After tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades failed to disperse the protesters, police reportedly opened fire with live ammunition, killing and wounding dozens. Police released detained opposition leaders in the hopes of reducing tensions. Later that day, demonstrators led by Tekebayev occupied the legislative building, other protesters seized the state television and radio building, and the Defense Department and attorney general's offices were in flames. Protesters marched on a prison holding former defense minister Ismail Isakov, who had just been sentenced to eight years in prison on corruption charges, and the prison released him.

Late on April 7, Temir Sariyev and Roza Otunbayeva held talks with Prime Minister Usenov at the government building. Otunbayeva announced early on April 8 that Usenov had tendered his resignation, that his cabinet ministers had been dismissed, that the sitting legislature had been dissolved because it had been illegitimately elected, and that an interim government had taken over the powers of the prime minister, president, and legislature. Otunbayeva announced that her government included First Deputy Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev, in charge of economic issues; Deputy Minister Temir Sariyev, in charge of finances and loans; Deputy Minister Omurbek Tekebayev, in charge of constitutional reform and planning for the future of the country; and Deputy Minister Azimbek Beknazarov, in charge of public prosecution, courts and the financial police. She stated that the interim government would rule until presidential elections are held in six months. As one of her first acts as prime minister, she announced that the prices paid for water, electricity, and heat would be rolled back to last year's prices.

She also announced on April 8 that "we will hundred percent comply with all international agreements of the republic"; that the existing constitution would remain in place until a new one was drafted and approved by the citizenry; and that the status of the Manas Transit Center would not be immediately affected. However, she indicated that possible corruption involving commercial contracts with the airbase and the airbase leasing arrangements would be investigated.

In addition, Ismail Isakov was reappointed defense minister to consolidate the interim government's control over the armed forces. Bolot Sherniyazov was named the acting interior minister and Keneshbek Duishebayev was named acting chairman of the State National Security Service to assure the loyalty of these forces to the interim government. Sherniyazov immediately authorized the use of force against looters who had run rampant in Bishkek and elsewhere during the coup. New Deputy Prime Minister Atambayev stated that the government would soon draft changes to the constitution, the electoral code, and the law on peaceful assembly.

Baytemir Ibrayev, who had been appointed as the interim prosecutor-general, issued a warrant for the arrest of Usenov and several relatives of Bakiyev on charges of corruption or involvement in the deaths of protesters. Former President Bakiyev had legal immunity from prosecution as a past head of state, but Otunbayeva called for him to cease his alleged efforts to foment a counter-coup or civil war and to leave the country.

Security forces loyal to the interim government surrounded Bakiyev's forces in the town of Jalal-Abad on April 15 as negotiations were held on his surrender. That evening, the OSCE chairperson-in-office, Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, issued a statement that "as a result of joint efforts of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, U.S. President Barack Obama and

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev, as well as active mediation by the OSCE, along with the United Nations and the European Union, an agreement was reached with the Interim Government of Kyrgyzstan and President Kurmanbek Bakiyev on his departure from the country.” Bakiyev flew first to Kazakhstan with a few members of his family on April 15, where he signed a resignation letter, and then flew to Belarus late on April 19. On April 21 he repudiated the resignation letter on the grounds that the Kyrgyz interim government had broken an alleged pledge not to prosecute members of Bakiyev’s family.

On May 3, the interim government released a list of former officials and others wanted in connection with the shooting of civilians on April 7 or for corruption or other crimes. Rewards were offered for information leading to their capture. Individuals on the list included Usenov, three of Bakiyev’s brothers, Bakiyev’s son Maksim, and several deputy prime ministers and ministers.

On May 4, Otunbayeva signed a decree stripping Bakiyev of his presidential immunity, opening the way to his arrest and prosecution. The interim government explained that by killing civilians, Bakiyev had violated the tenets of presidential immunity. Bakiyev has maintained that his guards opened fire only after protesters started shooting into his offices.

Implications for Kyrgyzstan

The coup resulted in relatively large-scale casualties and much property damage, compared to the 2005 coup that brought Bakiyev to power.³ The health ministry reported that 85 people had been killed and over 1,000 injured. There was extensive damage to government buildings and commercial establishments in Bishkek and elsewhere that will take some time to repair.

Some observers argue that the coup was primarily a spontaneous uprising by mostly unemployed or underemployed youth whose discontent had reached a tipping point. The periodical *Eurasia Insight* has suggested that the events precipitating the uprising included the late March meeting held by Bakiyev, which showed his weakness, and many observers have asserted that heavy criticism of Bakiyev by Moscow fueled anti-regime sentiments.⁴ Other observers assert that political party opposition leaders planned the takeover, and that it was then carried out by youth groups.⁵

There are parallels between the coup in 2005 and the more recent coup. Both arguably were revolts against increasingly authoritarian regimes rife with corruption and nepotism. However, differences between the two coups include a higher level of casualties during the more recent coup, since government security forces opened fire on many demonstrators. The 2005 coup was led by disaffected elites, according to some observers, while the more recent coup was more a

³ CRS Report RL32864, *Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications*, by Jim Nichol, April 14, 2005.

⁴ “Kyrgyzstan: Bakiyev Confronts Political Crisis,” *Eurasia Insight*, April 6, 2010.

⁵ Analyst Eugene Huskey has asserted that the opposition preplanned the April coup. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Hearing on the Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Fuel, Contracts, and Revolution along the Afghan Supply Chain. *Testimony of Eugene Huskey*, April 22, 2010.

grass-roots effort and was more chaotic in execution. Just as the opposition leaders were not in control of the uprising, they are having difficulty in restoring peace, these observers argue.⁶

Analyst Monika Shepherd argues that in the face of the global economic downturn—which heavily impacted Kyrgyzstan because of the decline of remittances from migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan—Bakiyev did not meet with opposition leaders or otherwise reach out to the population but instead increasingly used repression to quell discontent.⁷

The disruption of the coup is likely to add to Kyrgyzstan's economic problems. Reportedly, some investors have been concerned about the interim government's nationalization of businesses and other assets in which Maksim Bakiyev had shares, and some investors have canceled pending projects. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan delayed reopening borders they closed at the time of the coup, leading some observers to accuse the countries of bias against the interim government. Kazakhstan reopened the border to cargo traffic on May 6 and announced plans to reopen for all traffic on May 11.

Some observers voice the hope that the coup has reversed Kyrgyzstan's deepening authoritarianism under Bakiyev and has put the country back on the path of democratization. Polish analyst Tomasz Sikorski has warned that most of the interim leadership is composed of individuals who also participated in the 2005 coup, and who subsequently failed to advance democracy and the rule of law in Kyrgyzstan.⁸ Even the hopeful observers acknowledge, however, that the country faces a difficult task in coming months of ensuring peace while it also approves constitutional changes and laws, holds a constitutional referendum, and holds presidential and legislative elections. To buttress efforts to restore civil peace, Atambayev was named the head of an interim commission on April 26 composed of the leaders of the security, police, and armed forces. That same day, the interim government released a draft constitution for discussion that proposes the creation of a parliamentary system of government perhaps modeled after that of the United Kingdom, in which the head of government (prime minister) comes from the main party in parliament and the head of state (president) has nominal powers. On May 3, Otunbayeva announced the creation of a 75-member constitutional commission, headed by deputy prime minister Tekebayev, to solicit suggestions and finalize a draft constitution by May 19, which will be approved by a referendum to be held on June 27, 2010. Otunbayeva praised the draft's call for setting up a parliamentary system, stating that "the experience of our country during the years of independence shows that a strong presidency inevitably leads to family authoritarianism.... We should not allow any of this to happen ever again."⁹ Legislative and presidential elections are scheduled for October 10, 2010.

The aftermath of the coup highlighted ongoing ethnic tensions in the country between some Kyrgyz ultranationalists and minority ethnic groups, including Uzbeks, Russians, and Meskhetian Turks. In one incident, ethnic Kyrgyz stormed the village of Mayevka, near Bishkek, on April 19, looting and seizing land from ethnic Meskhetians and Russians, and leading to five deaths. Police were able to evict the squatters a few days later.

⁶ Alisher Ilkhamov, "Not the Tulip Revolution All Over Again," *Transitions On Line (TOL)*, April 8, 2010.

⁷ Monika Shepherd, "Regime Change in Kyrgyzstan: A New Beginning or More of the Same?" *The ISCIP Analyst (Caucasus/ Central Asia): An Analytical Review*, April 8, 2010.

⁸ Tomasz Sikorski, "Overthrow of Kyrgyzstani President Bakiyev: Causes and Implications," *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs*, April 20, 2010.

⁹ *ITAR-TASS*, May 3, 2010.

To some degree, north-south tensions in Kyrgyzstan are related to ethnic tensions, since most of the ethnic Uzbeks in the country reside in the southern provinces of Jalal-Abad and Osh. Some ethnic Uzbeks feel excluded from participation in the central government in Bishkek in the north. Similarly, some ethnic Kyrgyz families and clans in the south feel excluded. The coup might exacerbate north-south tensions if it is felt that northerners led the overthrow of Bakiyev, a southerner. Some supporters of Bakiyev have called for the new constitution to set up a federal government where the north and south have “equal powers.” Tekebayev reportedly has rejected federalism on the grounds that it could contribute to separatism. Others in the southern provinces of Jalal-Abad and Osh have called for secession and the formation of the Democratic Republic of Southern Kyrgyzstan. Perhaps belying this sense of exclusion, several of the leaders of the interim government, including Otunbayeva, Tekebayev and Beknazarov, are southerners.¹⁰

International Response

During the violence on April 7, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, Dunja Mijatovic, called for the Bakiyev government to cease censorship and allow journalists to report on the situation in the country. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated on April 7 that he was “shocked” over the deadly clashes in Kyrgyzstan just days after his visit and appealed for concerned parties to show restraint. The next day, he announced that he would send a special envoy to Kyrgyzstan, Slovak diplomat Jan Kubis. The OSCE chairperson-in-office has appointed Zhanybek Karibzhanov as a special envoy to Kyrgyzstan. In addition, Adil Akhmetov, a member of the Kazakh delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was appointed a Special Envoy to Kyrgyzstan by Assembly President Joao Soares. It was agreed that the envoys would coordinate their efforts. EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton stated on April 8 that “I welcome the early signs of stabilization in Kyrgyzstan and an end to the confrontation.... The EU stands ready to provide urgent humanitarian assistance if necessary.”¹¹

On 29 April, the OSCE Permanent Council allocated OSCE contingency funds of about \$15 million to help address Kyrgyzstan’s budget deficit in dealing with post-coup needs. On May 5, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the interim government discussed setting up a group of officials and experts from international financial institutions to coordinate assistance to enhance political and economic stability in Kyrgyzstan.

Implications for Russia and Other Eurasian States

During the coup, Russia urged restraint between Kyrgyz authorities and the opposition and called on them to resolve their disputes through democratic means instead of violence. Indicating a bias against Bakiyev, President Medvedev reportedly stated on April 7 that “this situation is Kyrgyzstan’s internal affair but the form in which the protests erupted testifies to the utmost degree of discontent that the actions of the authorities produced among the rank-and-file people.”¹² After the coup, Prime Minister Putin publicly denied that Russia had any direct role in the coup, but he moved quickly to recognize the new interim government and to offer

¹⁰ *ITAR-TASS*, April 29, 2010; Bruce Pannier, “Future Kyrgyz Government Faces Traditional North-South Divide,” *RFE/RL*, April 26, 2010.

¹¹ *Agence France Presse*, April 8, 2010.

¹² *ITAR-TASS*, April 7, 2010.

humanitarian assistance.¹³ Otunbayeva and Tekebayev praised Putin for quickly offering humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. On April 11, Atambayev visited Moscow and reported that Kyrgyzstan had been offered a multimillion dollar grant of humanitarian aid.

Some Western and Russian media and Russian analysts have asserted that Russia largely orchestrated the coup because of dissatisfaction that Bakiyev had not closed the Manas Transit Center as promised.¹⁴ In contrast, the coup in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 was attributed by some officials in Russia and Central Asia to influence by the United States through pro-democracy assistance to non-governmental organizations. The United States denied any direct influence. According to this Russian triumphalist view, however, Bakiyev's ouster represents the removal of a regional leader who had been backed by the United States. They point to what they claim were successful Russian machinations in Kyrgyzstan to warn other regional leaders, particularly President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia, that they must pursue pro-Russian policies.

Months before the coup, Prime Minister Putin had indicated that \$1.7 billion of a pledged \$2 billion in loans to Kyrgyzstan (proffered the same day that Bakiyev had announced that the airbase would be closed) would not be forthcoming. According to one article in the Kyrgyz press, Prime Minister Putin allegedly raised concerns with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Usenov that "talk is reaching me of family business in Kyrgyzstan at state level. What is going on? How should this be understood?... I wish to remind you also that one of the conditions for receiving the loan was the withdrawal of the U.S. military base from Kyrgyzstan."¹⁵ Russian websites launched a number of anti-Bakiyev articles in March 2010, causing the Kyrgyz government to block the websites. The Russian embassy in Bishkek denounced the efforts to block the websites.¹⁶

According to one Kyrgyz analyst, immediately after Bakiyev had agreed in June 2009 to permit the U.S. Manas Transit Center to stay in place, Russia began to increase contacts with Kyrgyz opposition leaders.¹⁷ According to one U.S. analyst, Russian umbrage increased after reports in March 2010 that the United States might help fund and build an anti-terrorism training center in Batken in southern Kyrgyzstan (the United States already had helped Kyrgyzstan open a special forces training camp in Tokmok, near Bishkek, in October 2009), and Russia stepped up its contacts with Kyrgyz opposition leaders.¹⁸

In another move viewed by many in Kyrgyzstan as retaliation against Bakiyev, Russia had announced in late March 2010 that it would greatly increase customs duties on gasoline and other petroleum products exported to members of the Commonwealth of Independent States that did not belong to a customs union (members of the customs union include Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). The increased duties disrupted supplies to Kyrgyzstan in early April, causing increased prices. The customs duties also may have directly reduced profits gained by Kyrgyz firms linked to Bakiyev that purchased fuel from Russia to sell to the Manas Transit Center. On

¹³ *ITAR-TASS*, April 8, 2010.

¹⁴ Philip Pan, "Russia Is Said to have Fueled Kyrgyz Unrest," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2010.

¹⁵ Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), December 7, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-9008.

¹⁶ Andrew Kramer, "Before Kyrgyz Uprising, A Dose of Russian Soft Power," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2010, p. A6.

¹⁷ Andrew Kramer, "Before Kyrgyz Uprising, A Dose of Russian Soft Power," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2010, p. A6.

¹⁸ *Testimony of Eugene Huskey*, April 22, 2010.

April 8, a Russian official reportedly renewed the call for Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas Transit Center (see below).¹⁹

On March 29, 2010, Nikolay Bordyuzha, the secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO; a Russia-led military cooperation group that also includes Armenia, Belarus, and the Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan), visited Kyrgyzstan and stated that “there are no grounds to speak about any kind of chill in Russian-Kyrgyz relations.... The Russian and Kyrgyz presidents have a busy schedule working [together].” Bakiyev reported that Bordyuzha contacted him during the uprising, but he did not mention whether Bordyuzha had offered the CSTO’s assistance in quelling it. Bordyuzha led a CSTO delegation to Bishkek on April 9 to assess the situation and make a report to the CSTO Collective Security Council. The chief of the Russian general staff, Nikolai Makarov, reported that President Medvedev had ordered that two paratroop companies comprised of 150 officers and men be deployed to Russia’s Kant airbase east of Bishkek, to a naval communication station in Chu Region, and to a naval test range at Issyk-Kul “to protect the families of [the Russian] military there, if need be.” The Russian government stressed that the paratroopers were carrying only small arms. Further troops reportedly were deployed on April 11. On April 30, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that 150 more troops would be deployed to relieve troops sent earlier.²⁰

Tekebayev travelled to Moscow on April 14, where he met with Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin and Prime Minister Putin, who pledged their support for the interim government. Russia subsequently announced that Kyrgyzstan would be offered \$50 million in assistance, 25,000 tons of petroleum products, and seeds for planting. State Secretary and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin visited Kyrgyzstan on April 25-26 to affirm Russia’s support for the interim government. He also praised the interim government efforts to protect Russian citizens residing in the country and their property from ethnic attacks.

Official media in all the other Central Asian states paid scant attention to the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan, in what seemed like a replay of reactions to the 2005 coup, which Central Asian presidents feared could have contagion effects. One analyst has pointed out that other Central Asian presidents were particularly alarmed that their common practices of nepotism and the designation of children as successors were apparent factors in the popular uprising against Bakiyev.²¹ Kazakhstan closed its borders after numbers of Kyrgyz reportedly attempted to cross the border to find refuge in Kazakhstan. On April 9, however, it indicated that it would soon reopen the borders and pledged humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan also closed its borders. The border closures exacerbate already problematic inter-regional trade and economic cooperation and could affect the land transport of U.S. and NATO supplies to Afghanistan (see below). Georgian officials raised concerns about Russia’s reputed involvement in the coup, but visiting Kyrgyz officials reportedly stated that the coup was “a result of the accumulated discontent of the Kyrgyz people with actions of the former authorities, in particular the difficult social and economic situation, nepotism and corruption.”²²

¹⁹ “U.S. Air Base at Center of Kyrgyz Crisis,” *MSNBC*, April 8, 2010.

²⁰ *ITAR-TASS*, April 8, 2010.

²¹ Farangis Najibullah, “Is Kyrgyzstan’s Revolution Ready For Export?” *RFE/RL*, April 28, 2010.

²² Statement of the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, reported in *CEDR*, April 12, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950029.

Implications for China

China is concerned that the coup could lead to a more democratic Kyrgyzstan that would inspire Chinese democrats and embolden some ethnic Uighurs (a Turkic people) who advocate separatism in China's Xinjiang region bordering Kyrgyzstan. Groups such as the East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM; designated by the United States as a terrorist group) have bases in Central Asia. China may also be concerned that peaceful Uighurs within a democratic Kyrgyzstan might become more politically active in advocating for their kin in Xinjiang. There was some looting and destruction of Chinese businesses in Kyrgyzstan during the coup that might be classified as hate crimes. China is also concerned that instability in Kyrgyzstan could result in increased cross-border smuggling and other crime. More widely, instability in Kyrgyzstan could spread to other Central Asian countries, harming regional trade relations with China.²³

China has stressed that its paramount concern is that law and order be reestablished in Kyrgyzstan and that “good neighborly relations” between the two states continue, including cooperation in combating terrorists. The latter includes work within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO; formed in by China, Russia, and most of the Central Asian states), headquartered in Bishkek. Matching in some respects Russian concerns about the CSTO, the coup reportedly raised questions in China about the effectiveness of the SCO’s emergency consultation provisions.

Implications for U.S. Interests

The U.S. embassy in Bishkek on April 7 issued a statement raising deep concerns about the unrest in some Kyrgyz cities and calling on all parties concerned to solve their conflict within the framework of the rule of law. White House National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer similarly stated that the United States was closely following the situation and felt concerned about reports of violence and looting, and urged all parties to refrain from violence and exercise restraint. After the announcement that an interim government had been formed, U.S. Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Larry Memmott met with Otunbayeva on April 8, reportedly to urge nonviolence and a quick restoration of order and democracy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Otunbayeva on April 10, and Michael McFaul, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Russian Affairs, reported that he also had talked to Otunbayeva. On April 12, President Obama raised concerns about Kyrgyzstan with visiting Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

At the time of the coup, Maksim Bakiyev, Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev, and other Kyrgyz officials were arriving in the United States for meetings, including with Administration officials as part of bilateral dialogues with Central Asian countries launched last year. The bilateral dialogue was “postponed,” according to the State Department, although a brief meeting was held between Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake and Sarbayev.

The United States and Kyrgyzstan had held talks on building a \$5.5 million counter-terrorism training center in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan. Russia had objected, since Kyrgyzstan earlier had balked (including because Uzbekistan had strongly objected) at permitting Russia to establish

²³ Open Source Center. *China: Daily Report*, April 13, 2010, Doc. No. CPP-136007.

another airbase there. The status of plans for the counter-terrorism training center is now uncertain.

Unlike Russia, the United States hesitated to immediately recognize the interim government. McFaul stated on April 8 that “the people that are allegedly running Kyrgyzstan—and I emphasize that word because it’s not clear who is in charge right now—these are all people that we’ve had contact with for many years.... This is not some anti-American coup. That we know for sure and this was not a ‘sponsored by the Russians’ coup.” Instead of competition between Russia and the United States over influence in Kyrgyzstan, McFaul suggested, President Medvedev had “pulled the President aside” during their meeting in Prague on April 8 to discuss developments in Kyrgyzstan and possible cooperative actions, including the involvement of the OSCE in facilitating peace.²⁴

In the wake of the coup, the United States provided more than \$200,000 worth of medical supplies to help treat the wounded. On April 14, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake traveled to Bishkek and met with Otunbayeva, further signaling U.S. support for the interim government. According to some observers, the visit helped convince Bakiyev to leave the country and formally resign his office. Assistant Secretary Blake stated in a press conference that “the United States believes that the provisional government and the people of Kyrgyzstan have a unique and historic opportunity to create a democracy that could be a model for Central Asia and the wider region. I offered [the interim government] the full support of the United States to provide technical and other assistance to help achieve that goal.”²⁵

Further support for Kyrgyzstan was evidenced by a visit by Michael McFaul on May 4-6. He announced that “U.S. President Barack Obama’s administration is ready to provide the necessary assistance in building a democratic society in Kyrgyzstan and maintaining stability in this country.” In line with a request reportedly made by the interim government to Assistant Secretary Blake, McFaul announced that \$15 million in lease payments for the Manas Transit Center would be delivered posthaste to the interim government. He also called for an open investigation of whether the transit center was damaging the environment and denied that the United States was complicit in corruption involving fuel contracts. He further stressed the U.S. commitment to democratization and human rights in Kyrgyzstan during a talk at the American University of Central Asia.²⁶

Some oppositionists and other observers argue that the United States de-emphasized its concerns over human rights and democratization problems in Kyrgyzstan in order to maintain good relations with the Bakiyev government and retain leasing rights for the transit center. They also allege that the U.S. embassy in Bishkek eschewed many contacts with opposition politicians as part of this policy.²⁷ The U.S. State Department and other observers, however, disagree that the

²⁴ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs Holds a White House News Briefing*, April 8, 2010.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State. *Press Conference in Bishkek*, April 15, 2010.

²⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Press Conference with Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller and Dr. Michael McFaul, Special Assistant to the President of the United States*, May 4, 2010.

²⁷ U.S. House of Representatives. Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs. Hearing on the Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Fuel, Contracts, and Revolution along the Afghan Supply Chain. *Testimony of Eugene Huskey and Testimony of Sam Patten*, April 22, 2010. At the hearing, Kyrgyz diplomat Baktybek Abdrysaev argued that the U.S. embassy treaded gingerly after Bakiyev’s apparent turn toward Moscow in early 2009. See also Alexander Cooley, quoted in *The Washington Post*, April 9, 2010.

United States de-emphasized concerns over human rights and democratization.²⁸ These observers also argue that, while some Kyrgyz politicians decried such an alleged de-emphasis, the politicians did not equally criticize Russia or China for not emphasizing human rights and democratization in their relations with Bakiyev. Also, Russia is not being asked by these politicians to close its airbase at Kant as a result, while the United States is being asked to close its “transit center,” they aver. McFaul stressed during his May 2010 visit that he was holding extensive meetings with civil society representatives, as he had during a previous visit in July 2009. He also underlined that the State Department *Human Rights Report* had criticized the Bakiyev government and that U.S. assistance for democratization had been increased. The U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan likewise claimed that she often had met with opposition politicians at the embassy and had always raised human rights concerns during meetings with government officials.

Reporting on the meeting between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in Prague on April 8, McFaul asserted that Russia had changed its view of the Manas Transit Center from that it held in February 2009, when it offered \$2 billion in aid to Kyrgyzstan as an implicit quid pro quo for closing the airbase. Instead, the two Presidents had held “an entirely different conversation today. We have interest in stability. We want to make, we want to monitor that the troops stay where they are.” In response to a question about an alleged statement by a Russian official that Moscow would urge that Kyrgyzstan close the “transit center,” McFaul stated that “I was standing next to the two Presidents discussing Kyrgyzstan and the notion that we need to close the ... Manas ‘Transit Center’ was not discussed. That [alleged statement] just simply seems spurious to me.”²⁹

At a hearing held by the House Subcommittee on National Security in April 2010, several witnesses called for boosted U.S. foreign assistance for Kyrgyzstan as a means of reversing perceptions by the Kyrgyz interim government and many Kyrgyz citizens that the United States had eased its backing for democracy and human rights in order to maintain good relations with Bakiyev. Analyst Alexander Cooley urged that the United States boost post-coup assistance to Kyrgyzstan above Russia’s \$50 million pledge. He also called for assisting the interim government in investigating Bakiyev government corruption in regard to transit center operations. Similarly, analyst Eugene Huskey urged more U.S. aid for hydroelectric projects. Diplomat Baktybek Abdrysaev called for the United States to launch highly visible aid projects to demonstrate that the transit center is not the only U.S. concern, such as boosting support for the American University in Central Asia, other educational institutions, and exchange programs.

While some observers have viewed Russia as orchestrating the coup and winning influence as a result, Russian analyst Tatyana Stanovaya has argued that members of Kyrgyzstan’s interim government are widely known by U.S. officials, that most members of the interim government have been pro-Western, and that U.S. officials have countered Russian actions by quickly offering assistance and visiting Kyrgyzstan.³⁰

²⁸ Tekebayev stressed on April 9 that the United States and Europe had criticized the 2009 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, while Russia had praised it as “fair and just.” However, he praised the Russian government for changing its view and making contact with the political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. *CEDR*, April 9, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-49005.

²⁹ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs Holds a White House News Briefing*, April 8, 2010.

³⁰ *CEDR*, CEP20100419015002

The U.S. Transit Center and Northern Distribution Network

The Manas Transit Center near Bishkek (see **Figure A-1**) plays a vital role in the U.S. surge in Afghanistan. Most U.S. troops enter and leave Afghanistan through the transit center. U.S. and French KC-135 tankers based there provide refueling services for U.S. and NATO aircraft flying missions in Afghanistan. In addition, the transit center plays a vital role as part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a number of rail, road, and air routes transiting the Caspian region to deliver supplies for U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. Some weapons and classified cargoes are sent via air routes to the transit center, and thence to Afghanistan. In addition, some supplies are sent by land through Kazakhstan to the transit center, where they are then flown to Afghanistan, although this is not a major NDN land route. In March 2010, about 50,000 troops passed through Manas, en route to or out of Afghanistan, according to the Air Force, a substantial increase over the average number of troops transiting per month in 2009.³¹

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman reported on April 8 that “currently there are limited operations at the Manas airfield,” but that the transit center hoped to “be able to resume full operations soon.” He also stated that in the meantime, alternative transit routes would be used.³² According to a U.S. Central Command spokesman, troop flights through the transit center were again temporarily interrupted on April 9, but resupply and refueling missions continued. Troop flights were renewed by April 12.

The transit center leasing arrangement comes up for annual renewal in July 2010 (automatic unless one or both parties lodge objections). Initially after the coup, some officials in the interim government stated or implied that the conditions of the lease would be examined. Otunbayeva warned on April 8 that questions of corruption involving commercial supplies for the transit center would be one matter of investigation. On April 12, she stated that she realized that 2010 was a seminal year for U.S. operations in Afghanistan and that President Obama planned on drawing down troops thereafter, and implied that ultimately she hoped there were no bases in the country.³³ On April 13, Otunbayeva announced that the lease on the transit center would be “automatically” renewed for one year.

Some observers warn that the status of the transit center is likely to become a campaign issue in the run-up to the planned October 10, 2010, presidential and legislative elections. For instance, the chairman of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, Ishak Masaliev, and the head of the Zharyk Kyrgyzstan Party, Rasul Umbetaliyev, likely would campaign on an anti-base platform if they run for president. In congressional testimony in April 2010, analyst Eugene Huskey warned that a party bloc might emerge before the presidential election that would campaign on anti-corruption and opposition to the continued operation of the transit center. At the same hearing, diplomat Baktybek Abdrisaev argued that Kyrgyz policymakers would not demand the closure of the transit center as long as terrorism continues to threaten Afghanistan, since the operations of the transit center benefit Kyrgyzstan’s national security.

³¹ Staff Sgt. Carolyn Viss, “LRS breaks 2 of their own records,” *376th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs*, April 5, 2010.

³² U.S. Department of Defense. American Forces Information Service, *Press Release: U.S. Afghan Supply Mission Continues at Manas*, April 8, 2010.

³³ *CEDR*, April 12, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-600. In March 2009, Otunbayeva raised concerns that Russia would gain undue influence in Kyrgyzstan as a result of the closure of the Manas airbase. She also stated that the lease and other payments for use of the transit center benefitted Kyrgyzstan’s economy. *CEDR*, March 6, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950134; June 24, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-358001.

Controversy surrounds the matter of jet fuel purchases by the transit center during Bakiyev's rule. According to the *New York Times*,

the primary source of aviation grade kerosene used at the [transit center] is an oil refinery in the Siberian city of Omsk, owned by the oil division of Gazprom, the Russian energy giant. Red Star, a company with offices in London and Bishkek, contracted with [the Defense Logistic Agency's Defense Energy Support Center] to buy the fuel and move it across several Central Asian countries to Manas. Chuck Squires, a former American Army lieutenant colonel, was hired to handle the contract.... Some of Red Star's business had been assumed by another company, the Mina Corporation Limited.... the trading companies made money selling cheap Russian jet fuel at world prices to the American base. Until April 1, when the Russian government abruptly imposed a steep tariff on refined products for Kyrgyzstan, these exports were tariff-free under a customs agreement. Within Kyrgyzstan, sales to the base were exempt from the usual 20 percent sales tax.³⁴

ITAR-TASS reported on April 30 that Kyrgyz companies held contracts with Red Star and Mina, including Manas Fuel Services, Kyrgyz Aviation, Central Asia Fuel, Aviation Fuel Service, Aircraft Petrol Limited, and Central Asia Trade Group, all of which were controlled by Maksim Bakiyev.³⁵ Some observers have alleged that U.S. defense or intelligence payments may have been made in effect to the Bakiyev family in return for permission for transit center operations, as they supposedly were made previously to the Akayev family, and reflect acquiescence to corruption and disregard for democratization. The United States has denied any such quid pro quo and has pledged to cooperate with the Kyrgyz investigation of fuel supply arrangements and an investigation by the House Subcommittee on National Security. During his April 15 visit to Bishkek, Assistant Secretary of State Blake reportedly stated that fuel contracts are always awarded in competitive and fully transparent tenders, and that if any irregularities are uncovered in the way they were secured or awarded, they might be subject to rebidding.³⁶

³⁴ Andrew Kramer, "Jet Fuel Sales to U.S. Base Are an Issue in Kyrgyzstan," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2010, p. A6.

³⁵ ITAR-TASS, April 30, 2010.

³⁶ Deirdre Tynan, "Kyrgyzstan: Manas Contracts Could Be Re-Bid - US Diplomat," *Eurasia Insight*, April 14, 2010; Deirdre Tynan, "Congressional Probe of Manas Base in Kyrgyzstan Off to Slow Start," *Eurasia Insight*, May 7, 2010.

Appendix A. Transitional Government Leaders

Roza Otunbayeva, head of the legislative faction of the Social Democratic Party. She was a former deputy prime minister, foreign minister, ambassador to the United Kingdom and the United States, and U.N. emissary.

Temir Sariyev, the leader of the Ak-Shumkar party. He ran as an opposition candidate in the 2009 presidential election.

Omurbek Tekebayev, head of the Ata Meken Party. He was a former speaker of the legislature. His party is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Almazbek Atambayev, head of the Social Democratic Party. He served as prime minister under President Bakiyev in March-November 2007. He resigned and accused the Bakiyev government of corruption and nepotism. He was the main opposition candidate in the 2009 presidential election. His party is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Azimbek Beknazarov, leader of the People's Revolutionary Movement. He was a former prosecutor-general. His party is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Figure A-1. Map of Kyrgyzstan



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 10/3/05)

Author Contact Information

Jim Nichol
Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs
jnichol@crs.loc.gov, 7-2289